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MISSILE TO CARRY WARHEAD CLUSTER

Special Offensive Capability
of Poseidon Disclosed

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 19—United States officials said today that the new submarine-launched Poseidon missile, now being developed, would carry multiple warheads.

One major purpose of such clusters of warheads on a single missile is to swarm over an enemy antimissile defense in hopes of slipping some nuclear weapons through.

Another is to enable one missile to attack several targets simultaneously or a single target covering a wide geographic area.

The whole question of multiple warheads has heretofore been considered highly confidential information. Under the ground rules of a background news session today, the officials who chose to talk about Poseidon's special capability may not be identified.

The officials were talking about two improved versions of the Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missiles. They then noted that the number of warheads that Poseidon would carry was much larger.

From other sources it was learned that the Minuteman 2 missile was not currently planned to carry multiple warheads but that the Minuteman 3, currently under advanced development, would.

Present planning for the 1,000

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missile Minuteman force calls for 800 Minuteman 1 missiles and 200 Minuteman 2's. An unspecified number of the older Minuteman 1 missiles will be replaced with the latest Minuteman 3 version when it becomes available in a few years.

The Administration's plan to develop the Poseidon, a much larger and advanced version of the Polaris missile, was first disclosed two years ago.

But only last November, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara announced at the LBJ Ranch in Texas that he had urged President Johnson to move from development to production of the submarine-launched missile at a cost of several billion dollars.

Mr. McNamara coupled that announcement with word that there was "considerable evidence" that the Russians were deploying a system of antimissile missiles in the Soviet Union.

The juxtaposition of the declaration on Soviet missile defense activity and United States offensive missile response was no coincidence, sources say.

Mr. McNamara intended to make clear that the Government considered it absolutely vital to maintain an unquestionable ability to retaliate against a possible enemy first strike by wiping out the attacker's homeland, even if that homeland was defended by sophisticated systems.

The Poseidon, which is believed to have at least twice the payload capability as existing Polaris missiles, could also carry a variety of electronic and other devices aimed at confusing the radar controlling the enemy's antimissile defenses.

The Administration's new budget, which will go to Congress next week, is understood to contain a request for funds to build the Poseidon and to modify existing Polaris submarines to accommodate the new missile in their launching tubes.

Very little is known about multiple warheads. It is believed that one early version, perhaps slated for use on Minuteman 3, is designed to separate into three separate warheads just before arriving at the extreme range of defensive missiles, thereby multiplying the enemy's interception problems.

Later models may carry larger numbers of individual warheads to be released at different points along the missile's trajectory and accurately projected toward different targets on the ground.

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